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ABSTRACT

Mental health professionals are becoming more aware of problems resulting from trauma. The earlier a trauma is identified and treated the better the chances of recovery, yet professionals do not always recognize symptoms or know what to do. If no one notices or intervenes, childhood abuse can lead to serious mental health problems in the adult years. Some adults suffer lifelong mental health and emotional problems. Others abuse themselves or others. There are several ways the average person can help to break the cycle of violence and trauma. When interacting with children or adolescents, be aware of unexplained bruises; sexualized behavior towards others; reports of bed-wetting or cruelty towards animals; or any marked change in their personality or behavior. Such activities should be reported to a teacher; counselor; physician; minister; and/or child protective services worker. Adults may also show signs of childhood trauma. Signs to look for include self-neglect; recurrent depression; compulsive sexual behavior; suicide attempts; alcohol or drug abuse; or self-injurious behavior. In these cases the adult should be encouraged to see a doctor or licensed therapist. Recovery is possible if an early response is available and support is offered. (Contains 62 references.) (JDM)

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ED 458 451

What Can Happen to Abused Children When They Grow Up - If No One Notices, Listens or Helps?

Some Statistics from the Research

For purposes of this document, "abuse" and "trauma" are defined as: *interpersonal violence in the form of sexual abuse, physical abuse, severe neglect, loss, and/or the witnessing of violence*

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If no one notices, listens or helps, childhood abuse can lead in adult years to:

SERIOUS MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS

The mental health system is filled with survivors of prolonged, repeated childhood trauma.

- 50 to 70% of all women and a substantial number of men treated in psychiatric settings have histories of sexual or physical abuse, or both.
  (Carmen et al, 1984; Bryer et al., 1987; Craine et al., 1988)

- As high as 81% of men and women in psychiatric hospitals with a variety of major mental illness diagnoses, have experienced physical and/or sexual abuse. 67% of these men and women were abused as children. (Jacobson & Richardson, 1987)

- 74% of Maine's Augusta Mental Health Institute patients, interviewed as class members, report histories of sexual and physical abuse. (Maine DMHMRSAS, 1998)

- The majority of adults diagnosed with Borderline Personality Disorder (81%), or Dissociative Identity Disorder (90%) were sexually and/or physically abused as children. (Herman et al, 1989; Ross et al, 1990)

- Women molested as children are 4 times more at risk for Major Depression as those with no such history. They are significantly more likely to develop bulimia and chronic PTSD (Stein et al, 1988; Root & Fallon, 1988; Sloane, 1986; Craine, 1990)

- Childhood abuse can result in adult experience of shame, flashbacks, nightmares, severe anxiety, depression, alcohol and drug use, feelings of humiliation and unworthiness, ugliness and profound terror. (Harris, 1997; Carmen, 1995; Herman, 1992; Janoff-Bulman & Frieze, 1983; van der Kolk, 1987; Brown & Finkelhor, 1986; Rimsza, 1988)

- Adults abused during childhood are:
  - more that twice as likely to have at least one lifetime psychiatric diagnosis
  - almost three times as likely to have an affective disorder
  - almost three times as likely to have an anxiety disorder
  - almost 2 1/2 times as likely to have phobias
  - over 10 times as likely to have a panic disorder
  - almost 4 times as likely to have an antisocial personality disorder

  (Stein et al, 1988)

- 97% of mentally ill homeless women have experienced severe physical and/or sexual abuse. 87% experienced this abuse both as children and as adults.
  (Goodman, Johnson, Dutton & Harris. (1997)

SUICIDE AND SELF-INJURY

- There is a highly significant relationship between childhood sexual abuse and various forms of self-harm later in life, i.e. suicide attempts, cutting, and self-starving particularly. (van der Kolk, et al, 1991)

- For adults and adolescents with childhood abuse histories, the risk of suicide is increased 4 - 12-fold. (Felitti, 1998)

- Most self-injurers have childhood histories of physical or sexual abuse. 40% of persons who self-injure are men.. (Graff, 1967; Pattison, 1983; Briere, 1988)

If no one notices, listens or helps, childhood abuse can lead in adult years to:

ALCOHOL AND DRUG ABUSE

- Nearly 90% of alcoholic women were sexually abused as children or suffered severe violence at the hands of a parent. (Miller, Downs, 1993)
- Up to two-thirds of both men and women in substance abuse treatment report childhood abuse or neglect. (SAMHSA, CSAT 2000)
- Teenagers with alcohol problems are 21 times more likely to have been sexually-abused than those without such problems.
- 71% to 90% of adolescent and teenage girls and 23% to 42% of adolescent and teenage boys in a Maine inpatient substance abuse treatment program reported histories of childhood sexual abuse. (Rohsenow, 1988)
- HMO Adult members who had experienced multiple childhood exposures to abuse and violence had a 4 -12-fold increased risk of alcoholism and drug abuse, and a 2 - 4-fold increase in smoking. (Felitti et al, 1998)
- Adults abused during childhocd are more than twice as likely than those not abused during childhood to have serious substance abuse problems. (Stein et al., 1988)
- 55% of Augusta Mental Health Institute class members with a dual diagnosis of mental illness & substance abuse report histories of physical and/or sexual abuse. (DMHMRSAS, 1998)

SERIOUS MEDICAL PROBLEMS AND HEALTH RISKS

- Medical impacts of childhood abuse include: Head trauma, brain injury, sexually transmitted diseases, unwanted pregnancy, HIV infection, physical disabilities (back injury, orthopedic, neck etc.) chronic pelvic pain, headaches, stomach pain, nausea, sleep disturbance, eating disorder, asthma, shortness of breath, chronic muscle tension, muscle spasms, elevated blood pressure. (Prescott, 1998; Cunningham, 1988, Morrison, 1989; Springs, 1992; Walker, 1988)
- Adults who had experienced multiple types of abuse and violence in childhood compared to those who had not, had a 2 – 4 fold increase in smoking, poor self-rated health, 50 sexual intercourse partners, sexually transmitted disease, a higher rate of physical inactivity, and severe obesity. (Felitti, 1998)
- A major HMO study reports adverse childhood exposures showed a relationship with the presence of adult diseases, including ischemic heart disease, cancer, chronic lung disease, skeletal fractures, and liver disease. (Felitti, 1998)
- Research reveals severe and prolonged childhood sexual abuse to underlie damage to the brain structure, resulting in impaired memory, dissociation, and symptoms of PTSD. (Briere, 1997; van der Kolk, 1996; Perry, 1994)

If no one notices, listens or helps, childhood abuse can lead in adult years to:

DELINQUENCY, VIOLENCE AND CRIMINAL BEHAVIOR

Reenactment of childhood victimization is the major cause of violence in our society.

- Numerous studies have documented that most violent criminals were physically or sexually abused as children. (Groth, 1979; Seghorn et al, 1987)
- Over 95% of perpetrators who sexually abuse female children and over 80% of those who abuse male children, are men. Most of these men were abused themselves in childhood. (Fergusson & Mullen, 1999)
- Children from violent homes are 24 times more likely to commit sexual assault than their counterparts from non-violent homes. (Dinzinger, 1996)
- Of 14 juveniles condemned to death for murder in the US in 1987, 12 had been brutally physically abused and 5 had been sodomized by relatives as children. (Lewis et al. 1988)
- A study of convicted killers reports 83.8% suffered severe physical and emotional abuse and 32.2% were sexually violated as children. (Blake, 1995)
- 85% of boys and girls committed to the Maine Youth Center report a history of childhood trauma. (MAYSI: Massachusetts Assessment Youth Screening Inventory Assessment. Sept, 1999)
- Over 75% of juvenile girls identified as delinquent by court have been sexually abused. When they run away from the abuse at home, they are often labeled as delinquent. (Calhoun et al 1993)
- 80% of women in prison and jails have been victims of sexual and physical abuse. These women are far more likely to be abused while in prison. (Smith, 1998)
- Without help, one-third of those abused in childhood may abuse or neglect their own children, perpetuating an intergenerational cycle of abuse. (Kaufman, 1987)

DEVELOPMENTAL OR PHYSICAL DISABILITIES

- Violence is a significant causal factor in 10% - 25% of all developmental disabilities. (Sobsey, 1994; Valenti-Hein & Schwartz, 1995)
- 3% - 6% of all children will have some degree of permanent disability as a result of abuse. (Sobsey, 1994; Valenti-Hein & Schwartz, 1995)
- Between 20% - 50% of abused children suffer mild to severe brain damage. (Rose & Hardman, 1981)

If no one notices, listens or helps, childhood abuse can lead in adult years to:

SEVERE SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Homelessness:

- 70% of women living on the streets or in shelters report abuse in childhood. Over 70% of girls on the streets have run away to flee violence in their homes. (Goodman, 1991' Chesney-Lind & Shelden, 1998)

Prostitution:

- Victims of child sexual abuse are at high risk of becoming prostitutes in adolescence or as adults. More than 50% of prostitutes were sexually abused as children. (Silbert & Pines, 1981; Bagley & Young, 1987; Pithers,)

Poverty and Welfare:

- More than 40% of women on welfare with multiple persistent problems in leaving the welfare rolls were sexually abused as children. (DeParle, 1999)

- 60% housed, low-income mothers on AFDC, experienced severe childhood physical abuse and 42% were sexually molested as children. (Bassuk,)

Truancy, Running Away, Risky Sexual Behavior:

- Childhood abuse has been correlated with increased adolescent and young adult truancy, running away, and risky sexual behavior. (Briere, 1992)

REVICTIMIZATION

Predators look for weak or vulnerable people. Having been abused as a child - especially having been sexually abused, makes one vulnerable to being revictimized.

- Women who are sexually abused during childhood were 2.4 times more likely to be revictimized as adults as women who were not sexually abused. (Wyatt et al, 1992)

- 68% of women with childhood history of incest reported incidents of rape or attempted rape after age 14 compared to 38% of a random sample. (Russell, 1986)

- Girls who experience violence in childhood are 3 to 4 times as likely to be victims of rape. (Browne, 1992)

- Childhood sexual assaults are associated with increased risk of adult assaults of both a physical and sexual nature, whereas childhood physical assaults, by contrast, were not related to adult victimization experiences. (Newman et al, 1998)

- Twice as many women with a history of incest as women without such a history are victims of domestic violence, and twice as many also report unwanted sexual advances by an unrelated authority figure (Russell, 1986)

- Victims of father-daughter incest are four times more likely than nonincest victims to be asked to pose for pornography. (Russell, 1986)

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If No One Notices, Listens or Helps

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What happens to abused children when they grow up?

Many develop emotional or physical problems

Many abuse alcohol, food, and other substances

Many hurt themselves or commit suicide

Many become violent towards others

Many recover - if help is available

Break the Silence

Abuse is very common

Experts estimate that, in the United States, 1 in 3 women and 1 in 5 men experience sexual abuse in childhood. Between 2,000 and 5,000 American children die annually from physical abuse. Countless trauma victims are now sitting in our jails and mental hospitals with no treatment and little hope for recovery.

Yet the subject is shrouded in silence. Most people, both the victims and those who know or suspect it is happening, say nothing. They may be silent out of shame, or fear of retribution, or fear of further humiliation. Or worse, they tell someone, but are not believed. Because of the silence, the cycle of abuse and violence continues, and the pain lingers on.

Children can heal, and adults can recover, if help is available

Today doctors and therapists are more aware of the problems resulting from trauma. They are also more aware that the earlier a trauma is identified and treated, the better the chances for recovery. Yet professionals do not always recognize the symptoms, or know what to do.

Anna was sexually abused by her babysitter at an early age. From puberty to her suicide at age 32, she was treated by mental health professionals. She was given many labels including borderline, paranoid, schizophrenic, and anorexic. She was given every kind of drug and every kind of therapy, even electroshock. Every therapy, that is, except the one she needed -- recognition and acknowledgement of her youthful trauma, and help in dealing with it.

In the example above, Anna received 4,124 days of hospitalization at a cost of $2.6 million. Had she had intensive trauma-based therapies at an early point in her youth, or even later on, Anna might still be alive today, and the cost would have been far less.

Counseling and early intervention are more humane, effective, and less expensive than mental hospitals, jails, and long-term medical care.

What happens to adults who were abused in childhood?

Some suffer lifelong emotional harm. Abused children are 2 to 3 times as likely to develop a serious mental illness. Multiple studies reveal that between 50% and 70% of adults and children receiving mental health treatment have abuse experiences in their backgrounds. Once in the system, they are more likely to be misdiagnosed and poorly treated. Many others never make it into the system or cannot find what they need there. They suffer silently without treatment.

Some suffer lifelong physical harm. Research shows that between 3% and 6% of abused children develop a permanent disability. Up to half suffer mild to severe brain damage, in some cases leading to learning and developmental disabilities. In adult life they experience a higher likelihood of heart disease, cancer, and other chronic medical conditions.

Some abuse themselves. As a result of internalizing the pain, abused adults are 4 to 12 times more likely to become depressed; this sometimes results in suicide attempts. Many try to dull their pain through the abuse of drugs, alcohol, nicotine, and other substances. They are more likely to have eating disorders and to injure themselves.

Adults who were abused in childhood are more vulnerable to being sexually exploited, to suffer further sexual abuse, and to contract a sexually-transmitted disease.

Some abuse others. The National Commission to Prevent Child Abuse reports that "The majority of women and men in the criminal justice system were abused as children." This finding has been confirmed by many studies of prisoners and juvenile offenders.

Support the Healing

What can the average person do to help break the cycle of violence and trauma?

In general...

- **Believe** when someone tells you
- **Be there** for them. It will help their healing
- **Educate** yourself and others about the effects of abuse and violence.

Specifically...

Identify and report suspected childhood abuse.

When interacting with children or teens, be alert for:

- unexplained bruises, welts, cuts or burns
- sexualized behavior towards others, either children or adults, which is developmentally inappropriate
- fire-setting, bed-wetting, or marked cruelty towards pets and animals
- marked change in child's personality or behavior, including withdrawal or aggression, anxiety or fearfulness, and avoidance of touch.

If you notice these, consult with a teacher, counselor, physician, minister, and/or child protective service worker. Don't be a detective. It's not your job to establish what is going on. However, if there is even a chance that something unhealthy is happening, you owe it to the child to take the first step and alert appropriate people immediately.

Be aware that adults also experience difficulties related to childhood trauma.

The American Medical Association lists the following possible signs of trouble:

- self -neglect, malnutrition
- recurrent depression, panic attacks
- compulsive sexual behavior or sexual avoidance
- suicide attempts
- alcohol, drug abuse
- self injury (cutting or otherwise physically harming oneself)

Sometimes these symptoms -- often viewed by survivors as ways to cope -- are triggered by an event which recalls the circumstances of the original abuse, such as:

- pregnancy or birth of a child
- illness or death of perpetrator
- divorce or death of parents
- child reaching a key age
- family reunions
- illness or injury of a child
- viewing a violent movie
- medical or dental examination
- new workplace situation

If you have a reason to be concerned about a friend, family member, or neighbor, encourage him or her to see a doctor or licensed therapist. The earlier the response, the better the chance of success. For recovery is truly possible.

With support, survivors can and do achieve a sense of self-mastery.

They develop caring relationships and find meaning and purpose in life.

They find their voices and are able to speak out against abuse and injustice.

In the end, their journeys reveal the incredible resilience and strength of the human spirit.

Resources

Child Protective Services 1-800-452-1999
1-800-963-9490 TTY

Maine Coalition Against Sexual Assault
1-800-871-7741
1 888-458-5599 TTY

Maine Coalition to End Domestic Violence 941-1194

Department of Mental Health, Mental Retardation and Substance Abuse Services

Crisis Line	**1 -888-568-1112 / TTY**
Portland Regional Office	**822-0270 / 822-0272 TTY**
Augusta Regional Office	**287-8118 / 287-4238 TTY**
Bangor Regional Office	**941-4360 / 941-4392 TTY**
Office of Trauma Services	**287-4250**

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